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ABSTRACT

In this information-saturated society, only a tiny part of the daily barrage of facts and opinions that pour forth from a 100 sources can be received and absorbed. Consequently, individuals must depend on the major media of communication to sift the information and decide what is worthy of being called news. Two hundred-forty journalists and broadcasters, largely from the prestige media, including "The New York Times," the "Washington Post," the "Wall Street Journal," "Time," "Newsweek," and the television networks were interviewed. These media elite identify themselves as liberals, and from 1964 through 1976 they voted for the Democratic presidential candidate 80% of the time. On many social and political issues, their views differ notably from middle class American values and preferences; 89%, for example, support abortion on demand, and 58% believe that the United States exploits the Third World and causes poverty there. The study reveals that the media elite see the business elite as the most influential leadership group (other than politicians) in the United States and themselves as second. The journalists believe, however, that they themselves should be in the top position of influence. The consequences of this combination of influence, aspiration, and bias in the media elite are difficult to measure, but common sense buttressed by solid content studies suggests there is a link between journalists' policy preferences and their performance. (BZ)

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The Media Elite and American Values

S. Robert Lichter
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The Media Elite and American Values

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Foreword

We Americans live in an information-saturated society. We can receive and absorb only a tiny part of the daily barrage of facts and opinions that pours forth from a hundred sources. Consequently, we must depend upon the major media of communication to sift the information and decide what is worthy of being called news.

This decision-making power rests primarily with the so-called prestige media and especially the *New York Times*. In his book *News from Nowhere*, published in 1973, Edward J. Epstein noted that news executives and editors "tend to receive very similar information" because they rely heavily on what he calls the "New York fulcrum." "'Like it or not,'" Epstein quotes one news executive as saying, "'the *Times* is our bible; it tells us what is likely to be considered important by others.'"

Epstein concludes that the "eastern-liberal syndrome" tends to favor sweeping reform and naturally criticizes rather than defends our social institutions. Making a similar point, Senator Daniel P. Moynihan has said that the more highly educated media members, especially those in Washington, have become a part of an "adversary culture" that is frequently hostile to traditional values and institutions. Columnist Robert Novak has called the national media "a melting pot where the journalists, regardless of background, are welded into a homogeneous ideological mold, joined to the liberal establishment, and alienated from the masses."

Speaking specifically of TV news, Paul H. Weaver said that "the proposition that TV news is biased should be about as controversial as the law of gravity," adding that the real question is: "*How* are the media biased, and what *is* the consequent effect on our interests and values?"

The essay reprinted here deals with the first part of this question. Two scholars, S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman, interviewed 240 journalists and broadcasters, largely from the prestige media, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS network news departments. Their systematic interviews confirm the evaluations of the media cited above. The media elite identify themselves as liberals; from 1964 through 1976 they voted for the Democratic presidential candidate 80 per cent of the time. On many social and political issues their views differ notably from middle American values and preferences; 89 per cent, for example, support abortion on demand, and 58 per cent believe that the United States exploits the Third World and causes poverty there.

The Lichter-Rothman study reveals that the media elite see the business elite as the most influential leadership group (other than politicians) in American life and themselves as the second. The journalists believe, however, that they themselves *should* be in the top position of influence.

The consequences of this combination of influence, aspiration, and bias in the media elite are difficult to measure, but common sense buttressed by solid content studies suggests there is a link between journalists' policy preferences and their performance. One study found, for example, that during a fifty-eight-month period (January 1974 through October 1978), less than 5 per cent of the news about foreign intelligence carried on the evening TV news of ABC, CBS, and NBC dealt with Soviet-bloc agencies; slightly more than 95 per cent dealt with the CIA. Of the CIA reporting, only 13.9 per cent (measured in minutes) reflected favorably on the agency; 68.2 per cent reflected unfavorably, and the rest was neutral. The net impact of this reporting was a highly negative and distorted picture of CIA activities. (See *The CIA and the American Ethic* by Ernest W. Lefever and Roy Godson [Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980], pages 96-118.)

The Lichter-Rothman essay is reprinted here as a contribution to informed debate by the Ethics and Public Policy Center. As in all Center publications, the authors alone are responsible for the facts selected and the conclusions reached.

Ernest W. Lefever, President
Ethics and Public Policy Center

April 1982

THE MEDIA ELITE AND AMERICAN VALUES

by S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman

Yesteryear's ragtag muckrakers, who tirelessly championed the little guy against powerful insiders, have become insiders themselves. Newsmen have long cherished the vantage point of the outsiders who keep the insiders straight. But now, leading journalists are courted by politicians, studied by scholars and known to millions through their bylines and televised images. In short, the needs of a society increasingly hungry for information have contributed to the rise of a national news network—the new media elite. Leading figures within this network are anything but the low-lifes and ambulance chasers mythologized in *The Front Page*. Instead they constitute a new leadership group that competes for influence alongside more traditional elites representing business, labor, government, and other sectors of society.

As columnist Joseph Kraft writes, "in the past two decades, those of us in the press have undergone a startling transformation. We are among the principal beneficiaries of American life. We have enjoyed a huge rise in income, in status, and in power. . . . We have moved from the sidelines to the center of the action."[1]

Eric Sevareid, in his final CBS commentary, put it even more succinctly: "We are no longer starvelings and we sit above the salt. We have affected our times."[2]

The influence of the press is based not on money or political power but on the information and ideas they transmit to other social leaders, as well as to the general public. Even those who question the media's power to persuade grant their ability to help set the agenda for discussions about social policy. Bernard Cohen notes, "the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think *about*."[3]

As part of a larger study on elites, we surveyed members of the national media elite during 1979 and 1980.* We wanted to discover their backgrounds, attitudes, and outlooks toward American society and their own profession. We conducted hour-long interviews with 240 journalists and broadcasters at the most influential media outlets, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time* magazine, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and the news departments at CBS, NBC, ABC and PBS, along with major public broadcasting stations.[4]

Within each organization, we selected individuals randomly from among those responsible for news content. In the print medium we interviewed reporters, columnists, department heads, bureau chiefs, editors and executives responsible for news content. In the broadcast medium we selected correspondents, anchormen, producers, film editors, and news executives. A very high proportion of those contacted, 76 percent, completed the interview. The response rate was high enough to insure that our findings provide insight into the composition and perspective of this new elite.

To provide comparisons with a more traditional leadership group, we also surveyed executives at several major corporations. We interviewed at seven *Fortune 500* companies, ranging from a multinational oil company and a major bank to a public utility and a nationwide retail chain. We chose randomly from upper and middle management at each company and completed 216 interviews, or 96 percent of those contacted. The focus of this article is, of course, the media elite. At appropriate points, however, we will compare their attitudes to those of the successful and influential leaders in the business world.

* This study is directed by Rothman and Lichter, under the auspices of the Research Institute on International Change at Columbia University. The surveys of media and business leaders were supervised by Response Analysis, a survey research organization.

Who Are the Media Elite?

The social and personal backgrounds of the media elite are summarized in table 1. In some respects, the journalists we interviewed appear typical of leadership groups throughout society. The media elite is composed mainly of white males in their thirties and forties. Only one in twenty is nonwhite; one in five is female. They are highly educated, well-paid professionals. Ninety-three percent have college degrees, and a majority (55 percent) attended graduate school as well. These figures reveal them as one of the best educated groups in America. They are also one of the better paid groups, despite journalism's reputation as a low paying profession. In 1978, 78 percent earned at least $30,000, and one in three had salaries that exceeded $50,000. Moreover, nearly half (46 percent) reported family incomes above $50,000.

Table 1
Backgrounds of the Media Elite

	95%
White	79
Male	68
From northeast or north central states	42
From metropolitan area	40
Father graduated college	40
Father occupation "professional"	93
College graduate	55
Postgraduate study	78
Income $30,000+	46
Family income $50,000+	54
Political liberal	50
Religion "none"	

Geographically, they are drawn primarily from northern industrial states, especially from the northeast corridor. Two-fifths come from three states: New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Another 10 percent hail from New England, and almost one in five was raised in the big industrial states just to the west—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio. Thus, over two-thirds of the media elite come from these three clusters of states. By contrast, only 3 percent are drawn from the entire Pacific coast, including California, the nation's most populous state.

Journalism is a profession associated with rapid upward mobility, yet we found few Horatio Alger stories in the newsroom. On the contrary, many among the media elite enjoyed socially privileged upbringings. Most were raised in upper-middle-class homes. Almost half their fathers were college graduates, and one in four held a graduate degree. Two in five are the children of professionals—doctors, lawyers, teachers, and so on. In fact, one in twelve is following in his father's footsteps as a second generation journalist. Another 40 percent describe their fathers as businessmen. That leaves only one in five whose father was employed in a low status blue or white collar job. Given these upper status positions, it is not surprising that their families were relatively well off. Forty-five percent rate their family's income while they were growing up as above average, compared to 26 percent who view their early economic status as below average.

In sum, substantial numbers of the media elite grew up at some distance from the social and cultural traditions of small town "middle America." Instead, they were drawn from big cities in the northeast and north central states. Their parents tended to be well off, highly educated members of the upper middle class, especially the educated professions.

Social and Political Attitudes

All these characteristics might be expected to predispose people toward the social liberalism of the cosmopolitan outsider. And indeed, much of the media elite upholds the cosmopolitan or anti-bourgeois social perspective that Everett Ladd has termed the "new liberalism."[5]

A predominant characteristic of the media elite is its secular outlook. Exactly 50 percent eschew any religious affiliation. Another 14 percent are Jewish, and almost one in four (23 percent) was raised in a Jewish household.[6] Only one in five identifies himself as Protestant, and one in eight as Catholic. Very few are regular churchgoers. Only 8 percent go to church or synagogue weekly, and 86 percent seldom or never attend religious services.

Ideologically, a majority of leading journalists describe themselves as liberals. Fifty-four percent place themselves to the left of center, compared to only 19 percent who choose the right side of the spectrum. When they rate their fellow workers, even greater differences emerge. Fifty-six percent say the people they work with are mostly on the left, and only 8 percent on the right—a margin of seven-to-one.

Table 2
Presidential Voting Record of Media Elite 1964-1976*

	Percent	Percent Voting
1964		
Goldwater	6	(62)
Johnson	94	
1968		
Nixon	13	(67)
Humphrey	87	
1972		
Nixon	19	(74)
McGovern	81	
1976		
Ford	19	(82)
Carter	81	

*Percentages based on those who voted for major party candidates. Third party vote never exceeded 2 percent.

These subjective ratings are borne out by their voting records in presidential elections since 1964, summarized in table 2. (The interviews were conducted before the 1980 elections, so our most recent data are for 1976.) Of those who say they voted, the proportion

Table 3
Media Elite Attitudes on Social Issues

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Economics				
Big corporations should be publicly owned	4%	9%	23%	65%
People with more ability should earn more	48	38	10	4
Private enterprise is fair to workers	17	53	20	10
Less regulation of business is good for USA	16	47	24	13
Government should reduce income gap	23	45	20	13
Government should guarantee jobs	13	35	33	19
Political Alienation				
Structure of society causes alienation	12	37	32	20
Institutions need overhaul	10	18	31	42
All political systems are repressive	4	24	26	46
Social-Cultural				
Environmental problems are not serious	1	18	27	54
Strong affirmative action for blacks	33	47	16	4
Government should not regulate sex	84	13	3	1
Woman has right to decide on abortion	79	11	5	5
Homosexuality is wrong	9	16	31	45
Homosexuals shouldn't teach in public schools	3	12	31	54
Adultery is wrong	15	32	34	20
Foreign Policy				
U.S. exploits Third World, causes poverty	16	40	25	20
U.S. use of resources immoral	19	38	27	16
West has helped Third World	6	19	50	25
Goal of foreign policy is to protect U.S. businesses	12	39	28	22
CIA should sometimes undermine hostile governments	26	19	36	19

	None	Democracies	Friends	Anyone
To what countries should we sell arms?	19	29	48	4

of leading journalists who supported the Democratic presidential candidate never dropped below 80 percent. In 1972, when 62 percent of the electorate chose Nixon, 81 percent of the media elite voted for McGovern. This does not appear to reflect any particular personal aversion to Nixon, despite the well-publicized tensions between the press and his administration. Four years later, leading journalists preferred Carter over Ford by exactly the same margin. In fact, in the Democratic landslide of 1964, media leaders picked Johnson over Goldwater by the staggering margin of sixteen-to-one, or 94 to 6 percent.

Most significant, though, is the long-term trend. Over the entire sixteen-year period, less than one-fifth of the media elite supported any Republican presidential candidate. In an era when presidential elections are often settled by a swing vote of 5 to 10 percent, the Democratic margin among elite journalists has been 30 to 50 percent greater than among the entire electorate.

These presidential choices are consistent with the media elite's liberal views on a wide range of social and political issues, as table 3 reveals. They show a strong preference for welfare capitalism, pressing for assistance to the poor in the form of income redistribution and guaranteed employment. Few are outright socialists. For example, they overwhelmingly reject the proposition that major corporations should be publicly owned. Only one in eight would agree to public ownership of corporations, and two-thirds declare themselves strongly opposed. Moreover, very few sympathize with Marx's doctrine, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Instead, they overwhelmingly support the idea that people with greater ability should earn higher wages than those with less ability. Eighty-six percent agree with this fundamental tenet of capitalism. Most also believe that free enterprise gives workers a fair shake, and that deregulation of business would be good for the country. Seventy percent agree that private enterprise is fair to working people, and almost as many, 63 percent, say that less regulation of business would serve the national interest.

Despite this basic support for private enterprise, we should not expect the media elite to lead the cheering section for Reagan's economic policies. Leading journalists may subscribe to a capitalist economic framework, but they are equally committed to the welfare state. Sixty-eight percent, about the same proportion that praise the fairness of private enterprise, also agree that the government should substantially reduce the income gap between the rich and the poor. They are almost evenly divided over the issue of guaranteed employment. Forty-eight percent believe the government should guarantee a job to anyone who wants one, while a slight majority of 52 percent oppose this principle of entitlement.

Of course, there is no necessary contradiction be-

tween praise for private enterprise and calls for government action to aid the poor and jobless. These attitudes mirror the traditional perspective of American liberals who—unlike many European social democrats—accept an essentially capitalistic economic framework, even as they press for expansion of the welfare state.

Despite their acceptance of the economic order, many leading journalists voice a general discontent with the social system. Virtually half, 49 percent, agree with the statement, "the very structure of our society causes people to feel alienated." A substantial minority would like to overhaul the entire system. Twenty-eight percent agree that America needs a "complete restructuring of its basic institutions." The same proportion generalize their criticism to include all modern states. They hold that *all* political systems are repressive, because they concentrate power and authority in a few hands.

It seems that a substantial portion of the media elite accept the current economic order, yet remain dissatisfied with the social system. Indeed, it is today's divisive "social issues" that bring their liberalism to the fore. Leading journalists emerge from our survey as strong supporters of environmental protection, affirmative action, women's rights, homosexual rights, and sexual freedom in general.

Fewer than one in five assents to the statement, "our environmental problems are not as serious as people have been led to believe." Only one percent strongly agree that environmental problems are overrated, while a majority of 54 percent strongly disagree. They are nearly as vehement in their support for affirmative action, an issue that has split the traditional liberal constituency which favored civil rights measures. Despite both the heated controversy over this issue and their own predominantly white racial composition, four out of five media leaders endorse the use of strong affirmative action measures to ensure black representation in the workplace.

In their attitudes toward sex and sex roles, members of the media elite are virtually unanimous in opposing the constraints of both government and tradition. Large majorities oppose government regulation of sexual activities, uphold a pro-choice position on abortion, and reject the notion that homosexuality is wrong. In fact, a majority would not characterize even adultery as wrong.

When asked whether the government should regulate sexual practices, only 4 percent agree, and 84 percent strongly oppose state control over sexual activities. Ninety percent agree that a woman has the right to decide for herself whether to have an abortion; 79 percent agree strongly with this pro-choice position. Three-quarters disagree that homosexuality is wrong, and an even larger proportion, 85 percent, uphold the right of homosexuals to teach in public schools. (A mere 9 percent feel strongly that homosexuality is wrong.) Finally, 54 percent do not regard adultery as wrong, and only 15 percent strongly agree that extramarital affairs are immoral. Thus, members of the media elite emerge as strong supporters of sexual freedom or permissiveness, and as natural opponents of groups like the Moral Majority, who seek to enlist the state in restricting sexual freedom.

In addition to these social and cultural issues, we inquired about international affairs, focusing on America's relations with Third World countries. Third World representatives to UNESCO have argued that the American press serves the interests of capitalism by "presenting developing countries in a bad light and suppressing their authentic voices,"[7] as a recent *New York Times* article put it. Such charges are supported by media critics like Herbert Gans, who claims that "conservative dictators . . . are apt to be treated more kindly (by the press) than socialist ones."[8] We cannot address these questions of media coverage. But we can assess the sympathies of the elite press on several of the controversial issues raised by these critics. Among these are U.S. arms sales, C.I.A. activity, and alleged American exploitation of developing countries.

In most instances, majorities of the media elite voice the same criticisms that are raised in the Third World. Fifty-six percent agree that American economic exploitation has contributed to Third World poverty. About the same proportion, 57 percent, also find

America's heavy use of natural resources to be "immoral." By a three-to-one margin, leading journalists soundly reject the counterargument that Third World nations would be even worse off without the assistance they've received from Western nations. Indeed, precisely half agree with the claim that the main goal of our foreign policy has been to protect American business interests.

Two issues dealing more directly with American foreign policy elicit a similar division of opinions. A majority of 55 percent would prohibit the C.I.A. from ever undermining hostile governments to protect U.S. interests. The question of arms shipments produces an even split of opinion. Forty-eight percent would ban foreign arms sales altogether or restrict them to democratic countries. Forty-seven percent would supply arms to any "friendly" country, regardless of the regime. Only 4 percent would be willing to sell arms to all comers.

Thus, in several controversial areas of U.S.-Third World relations, the media elite is deeply divided, with slight majorities endorsing some key Third World criticisms of America.[9] We noted earlier that many leading journalists criticize the American system from within, as "alienating" and in need of an overhaul. It appears that even larger numbers extend their criticisms to the international arena. About half charge America with economic exploitation and seek to limit C.I.A. activity and arms sales as instruments of our foreign policy.

Toward the Good Society

Thus far we have examined elite journalists' opinions on the great and small issues of the day. By charting their responses to numerous social issues, we try to gain an intuitive feel for their general perspectives on society and politics. The results can be deceptive. They create the impression of a broad ideological portrait of the media elite without ever asking journalists to deal with the "big picture." Their attitudes toward issues like abortion, affirmative action and arms sales provide us with benchmarks for understanding their outlook, since most of us have opinions on such pressing and hotly debated questions. But they do not address some of the most basic underlying issues of political life: What direction should American society take? What groups exert the most influence over social goals and political processes? How much influence *should* be wielded by such forces as business, labor, minorities, and the media?

These issues are as old as political philosophy. But it is not only philosophers who grapple with questions like "who should rule?" and "what is the good society?" Most people have answers to these questions, even if they haven't consciously arrived at them. Their answers express basic attitudes that underlie their transient opinions on current social issues.

In the interviews, we tried to tap these fundamental predispositions of political thought. First, we asked journalists about the goals America should pursue during the next decade. From a list of eight choices, we asked them to select the most important, second most important, and least important goal. The list, created by political scientist Ronald Inglehart, includes:

- Maintaining a high rate of economic growth
- Making sure that this country has strong defense forces
- Seeing that the people have more say in how things get decided at work and in their communities
- Trying to make our cities and countryside more beautiful
- Maintaining a stable economy
- Progressing toward a less impersonal, more humane society
- The fight against crime
- Progressing toward a society where ideas are more important than money

He classifies these choices as either "instrumental" and "acquisitive" values, on one hand, or "expressive" and "post-bourgeois" values, on the other.[10] In this list, the "post-bourgeois" choices are those dealing with participation, a humane society, beautiful cities, and placing ideas above money. On the basis of their other opinions, we would expect the media elite to be relatively supportive of these types of social goals. But relative to whom? Unlike standard polling items, these choices are not presented periodically to cross-sections of the American public. This is where our sample of business leaders comes in. As archetypal representatives of a bourgeois society, they should be oriented toward more conservative "acquisitive" values like a strong economy and national defense. Thus, they provide an appropriate comparison group for the media elite.

We found that substantial segments of the media elite endorse the "post-bourgeois" value orientation that Inglehart calls a "silent revolution" transforming the political culture of advanced industrial society. The results are shown in table 4. Only one in eight business leaders picks any of the "expressive" values as America's most pressing concern. By contrast, one in three journalists deems citizen participation, a humane society, or a society less oriented toward money as our most important goal—more important than either economic well-being or national defense.

Even among the journalists, a slight majority favor economic stability as the most important value. However, almost half of the media elite (49 percent) pick post-bourgeois values as their second choice, compared to 30 percent of the business elite. Forty percent of these leading journalists select a humane society as either their first or second priority, more than double the proportion among business leaders. Conversely, the businessmen list national defense more than twice as often as do the newsmen. Finally, the journalists are almost twice as likely as the executives to choose acquisitive values as the *least* important for America to pursue.

(Continued on page 59)

(Continued from page 46)

Overall, the media elite shows a clear preference for post-bourgeois goals, relative to the business elite. For many leading journalists, liberal views on contemporary political issues apparently reflect a commitment to substantial social change in pursuit of the good society, as they visualize it. Such a commitment would align them with emerging forces of social liberalism which are pitted against more established leadership groups. Therefore, as the final focus of our inquiry, we shall examine the media elite's evaluation of its competitors for social influence.

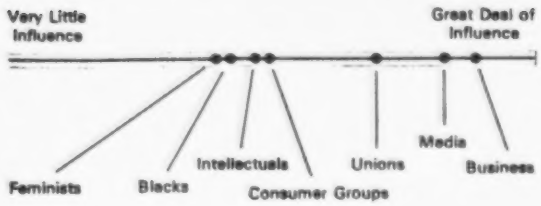
Who Should Rule?

Beyond inquiring about the direction our society should take, we asked a more pointed question: Who should direct it? Specifically, we asked the journalists to rate seven leadership groups in terms of the influence each wields over American life. Then we asked them to rate the same groups according to the amount of influence they *should* have. Each group was assigned a rating from "1," meaning very little influence, to "7," representing a great deal of influence.

The seven groups rated represent a cross-section of the major competitors for social power in contemporary America. They include black leaders, feminists, consumer groups, labor unions, business leaders, and the news media. The journalists' perceptions of these groups' influences are pictured in figure 1. They see four of the groups as relatively disadvantaged in the competition for social power. Feminists are least powerful, followed closely by black leaders, intellectuals and consumer groups. All four are clustered tightly together, however, well below the big three of labor, business, and the media. The unions rank third, leaving the media close on the heels of business leaders, who are perceived as the most powerful social group in America.

Thus, the media elite recognizes its own position of power, viewing itself as more influential than any other leadership group except the business community. It places itself between business and labor, traditionally the leading contenders for influence, and pictures the emergent forces of consumers, intellectuals, blacks, and feminists as playing a decidedly subordinate role.

Figure 1
Media Elite's *Perceptions* of Influence among Leadership Groups



When members of this elite are asked their preferences, this picture changes drastically, as figure 2 illustrates. They would strip both business and labor of their current perceived power, while raising the status of all the other groups. In the media elite's preferred social hierarchy, business leaders fall from first to fifth

Figure 2
Media Elite's *Preferences* for Influence among Leadership Groups

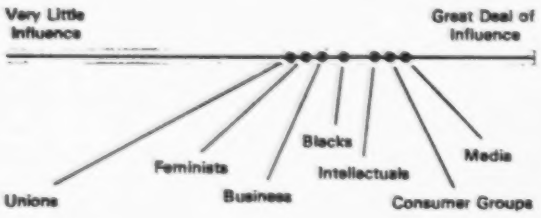


Table 4
Media and Business Elites' Choices of Most Important Goal for America in the Next Decade

	Acquisitive				Post-Bourgeois				Totals	
	Economic Growth	Stable Economy	National Defense	Fight Crime	Humane Society	Ideas, not Money	Community Participation	Beautiful Cities	Acquisitive	Post-Bourgeois
Most Important										
Media	10%	52%	6%	0%	17%	5%	11%	0%	67%	33%
Business	14	60	13	1	6	3	3	0	88	12
Second Most Important										
Media	9	18	14	8	23	15	8	3	51	49
Business	18	15	30	8	13	11	3	3	70	30
Least Important										
Media	15	2	12	10	10	9	22	17	39	61
Business	8	1	7	5	12	13	32	23	21	79

position, and unions drop to the very bottom of the ladder. Feminists move up only slightly, but blacks, intellectuals and consumer groups would all have more influence than either business or labor. Emerging at the top of the heap, as the group most favored to direct American society, are the media.

There is a certain irony in the media elite's choice of itself as preeminent in the race for influence. The press is traditionally ambivalent about its power, and journalists often either deny or decry the growing reality of a powerful media elite. In a 1976 study of elites conducted by the *Washington Post* and Harvard University, the media leaders were the only group to claim they want less influence than they already have.[11] In fact, one could say the same of our subjects, but it would be a deceptive interpretation of our findings. In absolute terms, these journalists would assign themselves a lower influence rating than they now have. On the other hand, they would assign even *lower* ratings to all the other groups, thereby leapfrogging themselves from the second position, as they perceive it, to the top spot they would prefer.

The business leaders, by the way, return the compliment. They perceive the media as far and away the most powerful influence on American society, with labor a distant second and business only third, followed by the four emergent groups. Not surprisingly, they, too, would prefer to sit atop the influence hierarchy, while burying the media well back in the pack in fifth position, precisely where the media elite would place them. Indeed, the hostility these two elites seem to feel toward each other is rather striking. Business leaders regard the media as the most powerful group of those listed and would reduce the power of journalists more than any other group. Media leaders perceive business leaders as the most powerful group and would likewise strip away most of their influence. One might speculate that these elites view each other with such mistrust precisely because each attributes great power to the other. In the ongoing struggle over the direction of our society, each appears wary of the other as its strongest competitor.

* * *

The pointed views of the national media elite are not mere wishes and opinions of those aspiring to power, but the voice of a new leadership group that has arrived as a major force in American society. Cosmopolitan in their origins, liberal in their outlooks, they are aware and protective of their collective influence. The rise of this elite has hardly gone unnoticed. Some hail them as the public's tribunes against the powerful—indispensable champions of the underdog and the oppressed. Others decry them for allegiance to an adversary culture that is chiseling away at traditional values.

While we advocate exploring the attitudes of the national media elite, we side with neither their extollers nor critics in declaring what kind of role the media do or should play. The crucial task that remains is to discover what relationship, if any, exists between how these individuals view the world and how they present that world to the public. This is the next key step to understanding how the evolution of the media elite has transformed American society.

1 Joseph Kraft, "The Imperial Media," *Commentary*, May 1981, p. 36.
2 Quoted in Gary Paul Gates, *Air Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 424.
3 Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963).
4 Several studies have shown these media outlets to be the most influential in influencing other social leadership groups. See, for example, William Rivers, *The Opinion Makers* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1965); Carol Weiss, "What America's Leaders Read," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Spring 1974, pp. 1-22; J. W. Johnstone, Edward Slawski, and William Bowman, *The News People* (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1976). For an extensive discussion of the news media elite, see Stanley Rothman, "The Mass Media in Post-Industrial America," in S. M. Lipset, ed., *The Third Century* (Stanford, Cal.: Hoover Institution Press, 1979), pp. 346-388.
5 Everett Ladd, "The New Lines are Drawn," *Public Opinion*, July/August 1978, pp. 48-53.
6 For a discussion of the effect of Jewish ethnicity on elite journalists' attitudes toward Israel, see S. R. Lichter, "Media Support for Israel: A Survey of Leading Journalists," in William C. Adams, ed., *Television Coverage of the Middle East* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981), pp. 40-53.
7 Paul Lewis, "Gloves Come Off in Struggle with UNESCO," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1981.
8 Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News* (New York: Pantheon, 1979), p. 37.
9 For a more extensive discussion, see S. R. Lichter, "America and the Third World: A Survey of Media and Business Leaders," in William C. Adams, ed., *Television Coverage of International Affairs* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982).
10 Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).
11 Barry Sussman, "Media Leaders Want Less Influence," *Washington Post*, September 29, 1976.

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